

The First 50 Women in Idaho Law

VIRGINIA RILEY RENWICK

August 13, 1965

(1927 – 1987)



Virginia Riley Renwick was born on May 27, 1927, in Portland, Oregon. She attended grade school and high school in St. Helens, Oregon. From 1945-46, she attended Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon, and Portland State College from 1947-1951. Renwick obtained her Bachelor of Laws degree from Northwestern College of Law in Portland, Oregon, in 1956 while working in the firm of Keane & Hessler in Portland as a legal secretary. Renwick passed the Oregon bar on October 21, 1964, and joined the firm of Keane & Hessler as an associate.

On April 13, 1965, Renwick was admitted in Idaho and went to work at Elam, Burke, Jeppesen & Evans (now Elam & Burke) in Boise as its first woman attorney. In 1970, she returned to Portland and allowed her Idaho licenses to expire. Renwick opened an office with Gladys M. Everett and Helen F. Althaus, in Tigard that specialized in family law.

According to *Serving Justice: A History of the Oregon State Bar 1890-2000*, recently published by Gordon B. Dodds and Cathy Croghan Alzner, Renwick became very active in the Multnomah Bar Association (“MBA”), a traditionally male-run organization. In 1972, the same year as the Equal Rights Amendment was passed by Congress, the women of the Oregon State Bar planned to nominate Renwick for the office of third vice-president in the MBA:

Wendell Gray nominated Renwick from the floor and she easily won the position. According to tradition, Renwick would work her way up and in three years she would become MBA president. Renwick did move up to second vice president, but in 1974 the year she was expected to be elected president the MBA executive committee changed the election procedure. Instead of using “town meeting annual banquet style,” the committee changed to a mail ballot and under this new system, Renwick did not win. While they were unable to prove it, many women believed this change was a deliberate effort to keep a female from becoming president.

Id. at 174.

In addition to her activities with the MBA, Renwick was active in the Oregon State Bar’s Family Law Section, authoring the *Change of Name* chapter in the CLE text on “Family Law.” She was honored by Two Thousand Women of Achievement for distinguished achievement in 1972, was included in *Who’s Who of American Women*, and was a member of Soroptimist and the Washington County Forum.

Renwick died on March 24, 1987 in Portland, Oregon at the age of 59 after a battle with breast cancer.